ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

A search engine comprising a crawler which crawls the WWW and stores pages found on the WWW in a database. An indexer indexes the pages in the database to produce a primary index. A document mapping section maps pages in the database into a plurality of tiers based on a ranking of the pages. The ranking may be based on portions of the pages which have a relatively higher value context. A processor produces a plurality of sub-indices from the primary index based on the mapping. The sub-indices are stored in a search node cluster. The cluster is a matrix of search nodes logically arranged in a plurality of rows and columns. Search nodes in the same column include the same sub-index. Search nodes in the same row include distinct sub-indices. A search query received by a user is sent to a dispatcher which, in turn, forwards the query to the first tier of search nodes. A fall through algorithm is disclosed which indicates when the dispatcher should forward the search query to other tiers of search nodes.